

Re-entry and Cleanup

Questions have been raised about possible dangers from dust that may have settled in residences and on belongings. Based on the air quality monitoring to date there is no reason to suspect that this dust would be a health concern. There is however concern about contact with building materials/debris and with safe cleanup and disposal procedures. While most of these materials in their normal construction state are relatively nontoxic, there may be some construction materials that contain small amounts of cancer-causing chemicals. Some of these materials may be irritating to the skin, especially to those with sensitive skin. If insulation, concrete dust, sheetrock dust, or other construction material dusts is breathed, it can be irritating to the nose and throat and may cause coughing. Exposure to contaminants in the air might trigger asthmatic attacks in people who already have asthma. Therefore, in order to avoid possible health problems the following is recommended.

Preparation and re-entry

- Do not return to the house until you are told it is safe to do so. *who is saying this*
- Protective clothing is important: wear goggles, heavy work gloves, and watertight boots with steel toe and insole (not just steel shank), long sleeved shirts, and long pants and avoid skin contact.
- Leave immediately if you hear shifting or unusual noises that signal that the structure may fall or if you smell gas or suspect a leak. If you smell gas, call 911 and do not turn on the lights, light matches, smoke, or do anything that could cause a spark. Notify ATMOS Energy 24/7 at 888-286-6700 to report issues or service requests.
- If you suspect electrical hazards that present an immediate danger contact 911. Notify your electric provider 24/7 Oncor at 800-666-2614 to report issues or service requests.
- Currently water is not available. City of West officials will advise residents when water is restored and safe for consumption. Check to see if when Boil Water Notice is lifted.
- Do not allow children to play in the affected area.
- Wash children's toys before allowing children play with them.
- Be mindful that house pets may carry contaminants on their coats. Clean dust off of house pets as best as possible.
- If you do get dust on your skin, wash it off as soon as possible. Wash your hands with soap and clean water, or use a hand-cleaning gel with alcohol in it.
- Well fitting dust masks may provide some protection during cleanup. A mask rated N-95 or P-100 will be more effective than simpler dust or surgical masks in blocking particles from contaminants. In general, many particles are larger than those found in smoke; thus, wearing dust mask can significantly reduce, but not completely eliminate the amount of particles inhaled.
- Persons with heart or lung disease should consult their physician before using a mask during cleanup.

- Debris inside structures may contain toxic substances because of the many synthetic and other materials present in buildings. Older buildings in particular may contain asbestos and lead. A more cautious approach should be taken in the removal of all debris from inside structures. *Scary language*

Clean Up

- Avoid getting dust into the air as much as possible. Do not use leaf blowers or take other actions that will put debris/dust into the air.
- Shop vacuums and other common vacuum cleaners do not filter out small particles, but rather blow such particles out the exhaust into the air where they can be breathed. The use of shop vacuums and other non-HEPA filter vacuums is not recommended. HEPA filter vacuums could be used, if available.
- **Gentle** sweeping of indoor and outdoor hard surfaces followed by wet mopping is the best procedure in most cases. A damp cloth or wet mop may be all that is needed on lightly dusted areas.
- Use as little water as possible to wash dust and avoid washing debris into storm drains.
- Dispose of collected dust in secured plastic bags or containers that will prevent it from being disturbed.

How to tell if dust is affecting you:

Dusts can cause

- Coughing
- A scratchy throat
- Irritated sinuses
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Headaches
- Stinging eyes
- A runny nose
- Asthma exacerbations

If you have heart or lung disease, the cleanup process might make your symptoms worse.

Seek medical attention if you experience the following symptoms.

- Chest pain
- Rapid heartbeat
- Shortness of breath
- Fatigue

Dusts may worsen symptoms for people who have pre-existing respiratory conditions, such as respiratory allergies, asthma, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), in the following ways:

- Inability to breathe normally
- Cough with or without mucus
- Chest discomfort
- Wheezing and shortness of breath

When dusts levels are high enough, even healthy people may experience some of these symptoms.

